



READY by AGE 21

Connecticut's Positive Youth Development Initiative



Policy Briefing II
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Ready by Age 21 (R-21)

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Positive Youth Development Public Policy for Connecticut

Youth Futures' Policy Team

The Connecticut General Assembly has convened a Youth Futures' Policy Team with broad representation of key stakeholders including: legislators, youth, parents, educators, youth providers, health and mental health providers, philanthropy, local elected officials, business and members of the Judicial and Executive Branches of government to guide the development of a comprehensive positive youth development strategic plan for implementation by the State of Connecticut.

The Plan will establish a coherent policy agenda for young people making the transition from adolescence to adulthood through funder collaboration and shared decision making with youth and community stakeholders.



Problem Statement

Most of Connecticut's youth get the right kind of support from their families and communities; but many others do not. Connecticut has many programs and a significant amount of funding dedicated to assisting young people. With rapid changes in our society and a declining sense of community, many of the ways that young people have traditionally received the support they need have been diminished or eliminated. Meeting the developmental needs of our young people is critical-not

only for their personal and economic well being, but also for that our society and our state.

Positive Youth Development Framework

- A positive youth development framework seeks to assure that all young people have access to ongoing relationships with caring adults; safe places with structured activities; access to services that promote healthy lifestyles, including those improving physical and mental health; opportunities to acquire marketable skills and competencies; and opportunities for community service and civic participation.
- A positive youth development framework seeks to create comprehensive, coordinated youth development services that incorporate best practices in policy and budget priorities focused on clearly defined developmentally appropriate outcomes for youth instead of focusing on fixing problems.
- A positive youth development framework recognizes age-appropriate investments that provide opportunities for growth and mastery in the multiple disciplines that contribute to the whole young person.



Mission:

To embed positive youth development approaches in state policy and practice to ensure every youth in Connecticut is Ready by Age 21 to participate fully in work, college and life.

**Principles**

The following principles will help ensure that state and community programs and initiatives seek to connect young people to school, work and caring adults and are rooted in the best available research on what works:

- Intervene early: prevention is always less costly, in both human and financial terms, than later attempts to reverse bad outcomes.
- View youth as resources: a narrow focus on certain categories of youth, i.e. disconnected, juvenile delinquents etc views youth as problems to be fixed, instead young people should have a voice in planning for their future success at the individual, programmatic and policy level.

- Create multiple pathways to success: no single program or approach will work for every youth. Because life-changing shifts in personal goals and attitudes take time, multiple options for moving forward are essential for youth and older teenagers on to young adulthood.
- Insist on accountability- young people will be held accountable for their actions and public systems and community agencies that are leading efforts should be held accountable for outcomes and be expected to document that they are making progress.

Goals of the Policy Team

Develop public policy options and/or administrative options that accomplish the following systems changes:

- 1.Coordination: ensure that there are mechanisms and infrastructures for increased communication, connection and integration across youth services to increase effectiveness.
- 2.Accountability: ensure that all state youth services work from a common vision for success of Connecticut's youth and positive outcomes guide strategic planning and document results.
- 3.Opportunities: develop strategies to increase the involvement of young people in meaningful roles within youth services, school, community and decision-making.



System Efficiencies:

- Better leveraging of existing resources and creation of new investments in vulnerable youth from federal and foundation sources.
- Re-align state and local resources and programs to more effectively serve youth.
- Identification of best practices and promising, innovative model programs including increased leadership development opportunities, paid internships and connections with caring adults.
- Partner with state and local youth initiatives to foster collaboration (i.e. Connecticut Vision Team, Connecticut Employment and Training Commission, Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative, JJ Alliance, DMR/NGA Transitioning youth with disabilities to successful young adulthood and others)
- Establishment of mechanisms to involve youth and community stakeholders in decision making and planning for youth services.
- Establishment of short and long term goals and a timetable to implement the plan;
- Recommendations for state and local governance structures to implement the plan.

Youth Outcomes:

Establish positive youth outcomes to measure the success of the system, such as:

- Increased school attendance;
- Improved academic and/or technical proficiencies;
- Increased high school diplomas or GEDs;
- Increased number of youth enrolled in post-high school education/training;
- Report by youth of at least one adult they can go to;
- Employment experiences that build skills and successes
- Full employment (if not in school);
- Engaged in community efforts;
- Live in stable housing;
- Increased access to physical and mental health care; and
- Act as leaders and mentors to other youth.

The Ready by 21 Plan seeks to establish a coordinated approach to supporting young people's development from age 14 years to age 21 years. The focus will be on policies that foster collaboration among youth, business, faith based organizations, family and community to ensure youth are fully engaged and Ready by 21 instead of focusing on problems to be "fixed."

The problems and challenges that our young people face today do not develop in isolation. Our efforts to address these problems can no longer work in isolation. Helping our young people realize their hopes and dreams- and ensuring a healthy future for our communities and state requires coordination, accountability and creation of opportunity throughout Connecticut.



The Futures' Policy Team welcomes private funding to assist in accomplishing the work of the Task Force.

Honorary Co-chairs: Senate President Pro Tempore Donald Williams and Speaker of the House James Amann

Leadership Team: Representatives Ken Green, Toni Walker, Gail Hamm, Betty Boukus; Janice Gruendel, Special Policy Advisor to Governor Rell; Charlene Russell-Tucker, State Department of Education; Jon Swift, Office of Workforce Competitiveness and Liz Brown, Connecticut Commission on Children.